

# FAIRBANK HISTORIC TOWNSITE

## Walking Tour

## Hiking Guide

## Historic Timeline

All buildings, artifacts and other features in the SPRNCA are protected under Federal laws, including the National Historic Protection Act (1986) and the Archeological Resource Protection Act (1979). Please respect our heritage by treating our nation's precious cultural resources with care.

### Fairbank Historic Timeline

- 1539. Fray Marcos de Niza explores the San Pedro River for Spain and describes the valley here as an "irrigated, evergreen garden."
- 1695. Father Eusebio Kino visits Sobaipuri villages near present Fairbank.
- 1698. The Sobaipuri and Apache fight at Gaybanipitea, just south of modern Fairbank.
- 1823. The Elias family of Sonora is granted the San Juan de Boquillas y Nogales land grant.
- 1854. The Gadsden Purchase is ratified, adding this area to the United States.
- 1877. Silver (Tombstone) and copper (Bisbee) are discovered. The Grand Central silver mill is built just north of current Fairbank.
- 1881. George Hearst consolidates his ownership of the Boquillas land grant. The New Mexico and Arizona RR (NM&AZ) begins to lay track south from Benson.
- 1882. NM&AZ reaches the Babocomari and turns west. A depot is opened at the turn (near Tombstone). Wm. Hall and Harry McKinney survey a townsite and sell lots. In March 1882, there is a store, smithy, saloon and several houses. It has several names: "Kendall," "Junction City," "Wye," and finally Fairbank, named for Nathaniel Fairbank, a Chicago investor. The Mercantile is built.
- 1884. 74 male residents. A schoolhouse opens.
- 1885. Joseph Goldwater (great uncle of Barry Goldwater) operates a store in the Mercantile.
- 1887. An earthquake jolts the area. Houses are damaged and railroad tracks are bent.
- 1888. Phelps-Dodge forms the Arizona and Southeastern RR (AZ&SE), and constructs a route from Fairbank to Bisbee. A depot is built in Fairbank, which has four stores, five saloons and three restaurants at this time.
- 1889. The Montezuma Hotel is built.
- 1891. The Grand Central Mill closes.
- 1894. The AZ&SE builds a line from Fairbank to Benson. A flood damages the Montezuma Hotel, residences and railroads.
- 1898. The Southern Pacific RR (SP) acquires the NM&AZ.
- 1900. Attempted train robbery at Fairbank.



The Fairbank townsite is in the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area (SPRNCA), part of the National Conservation Lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management. Contact the BLM Sierra Vista Office at: (520) 439-6400 or visit their web site at: [http://www.blm.gov/az/st/en/prog/blm\\_special\\_areas/ncarea/sprnca.html](http://www.blm.gov/az/st/en/prog/blm_special_areas/ncarea/sprnca.html).

**Join the Friends!** If you are interested in the history and natural resources of the River and its conservation, please consider joining us in the **Friends of the San Pedro River.**

Members may participate in exclusive walks and events, become a Docent and help with preservation projects. Historic and natural walks are offered year-round. For more information view our web site at [www.sanpedroriver.org](http://www.sanpedroriver.org) or call us at (520) 459-2555.



Fairbank, ca 1890s  
Tombstone Courthouse State Historic Park



This brochure was developed by the Friends of the San Pedro River; funding was provided by the Bureau of Land Management.

# Welcome to Fairbank!

### A thumbnail of Fairbank history

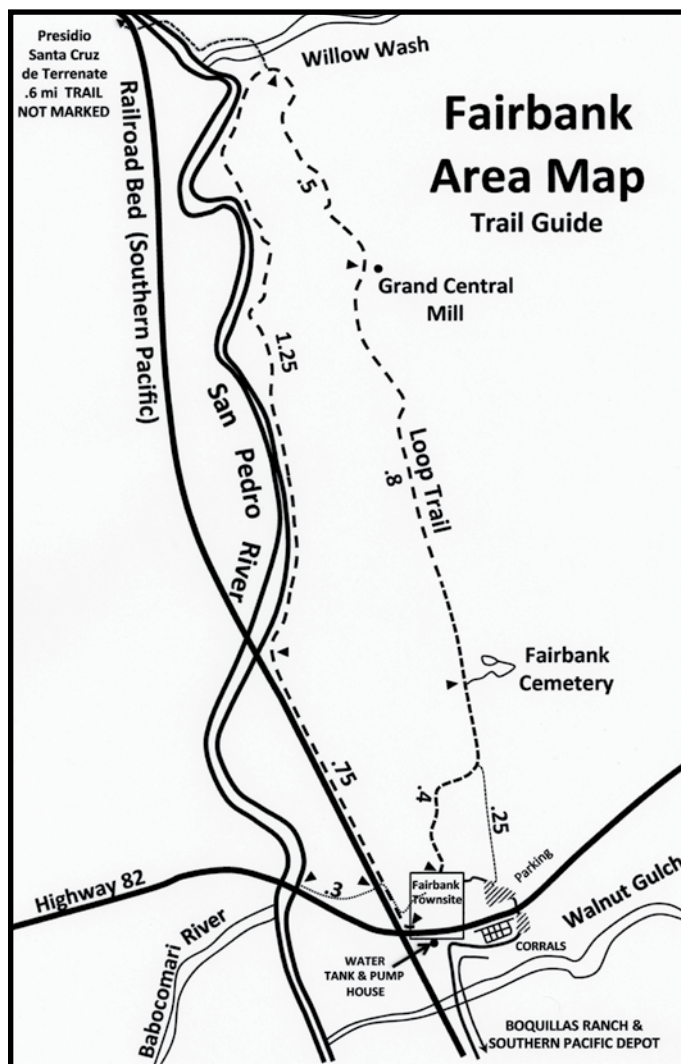
Fairbank was occupied from 1881 to 1973. It was founded during the Tombstone silver rush and survived the end of mining to become a railroad, ranching and commercial center. At one time, stage coach lines, Wells-Fargo shipping, a telegraph station, restaurants, saloons and a hotel operated here in support of three railroads. During its life, Fairbank endured floods, an earthquake and the eviction of the town. A 1900 train robbery is famous. Fairbank reached a population of over 200 during the 1910s, fading away as the railroad industry contracted.



Fairbank - Railroad Avenue, late 1890s  
Arizona Historical Society

### What to do during your visit

- Visit the Fairbank Schoolhouse, which contains a museum, book store and gift shop. The school is open Friday, Saturday and Sunday 9:30 AM to 4:30 PM
- Tour the town using this brochure
- Walk to the San Pedro River
- Walk to the Fairbank town cemetery
- Hike the four mile loop trail north of town
- Explore the Little Boquillas Ranch corrals
- Hike one of the other trails in the SPRNCA; see the guide in this booklet or ask at the schoolhouse



### Close-in walks round-trip distances:

- San Pedro River, 2/3 mile
- Fairbank pioneer cemetery, one mile
- Little Boquillas corrals (south side of Hwy 82), 1/4 mile
- Southern Pacific depot site (foundation), 1 mile
- Grand Central Mill, north on loop trail, 2.4 miles

### Longer hikes within the SPRNCA starting from Fairbank:

- Loop trail, 4 miles. North past cemetery, mill site
- Presidio, 3 miles. Reached from In Balance Ranch Road. Reachable, but not marked, from Fairbank
- Little Boquillas Ranch HQ. Five miles, also not marked. Follow the road south from Fairbank, past the corrals.

### Fairbank Historic Timeline (Continued)

- 1901. George Hearst's heirs sell the Boquillas land grant to the Boquillas Land and Cattle Company.
- 1902. The El Paso and Southwestern RR (EP&SW) is formed by Phelps-Dodge, it absorbs the AZ&SE.
- 1903. The EP&SW builds a spur from Fairbank to Tombstone; erects a new depot south of Fairbank.
- 1905. 25 residents. Ben Heney is president of the Fairbank Commercial Company (Mercantile).
- 1906. The U.S. Supreme Court validates Hearst's purchase of the Boquillas grant, voiding all other claims. Some residents tear down or burn their houses. The Mercantile, hotel, and some other properties are leased from the Little Boquillas Ranch. From this point on, most residents work for a railroad or the Little Boquillas Ranch.
- 1910. U.S. census: 40 households with 242 people.
- 1920. U.S. census: 37 households with 177 residents. A new schoolhouse is built after a fire.
- 1924. A business directory lists 200 residents. The SP acquires the EP&SW.
- 1929. Arthur Heney owns the Mercantile and Hotel and is manager of the Little Boquillas Ranch.
- 1930. U.S. census: 72 residents.
- 1941. The population is 125 residents. The Works Progress Administration (WPA) builds a stable, garage and privies. Highway construction causes a temporary increase in population. A second teacher is hired. Crews widening Highway 82 demolish the Hotel and several houses.
- 1944. The Fairbank School District consolidates with Tombstone and the Fairbank school closes.
- 1962. Train service to Patagonia ends.
- 1966. The SP Depot is closed and is soon torn down. Only a handful of residents remain.
- 1967. Tenneco Oil Co. acquires the Little Boquillas Ranch.
- 1972. SP train service along the San Pedro ends.
- 1973. The Mercantile and post office are closed.
- 1986. The BLM acquires the Little Boquillas Ranch from Tenneco Oil in a land exchange.
- 1988. The area is designated the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area.
- 2007. The school house is restored and opened as a visitor center.



# FAIRBANK TOWNSITE WALKING TOUR



Fairbank School, mid-1930s  
BLM

**Schoolhouse.** The first Fairbank school was built in 1884. That wooden structure burned down in 1920; it was replaced by the current building. The new school had one room that could be divided by a partition; a side room was added in the 1930s. Up to 45 children attended, grades 1 to 8. One or two teachers worked here. The school was a community center, hosting dances and events. A fence enclosed the schoolyard, including boys' and girls' privies. Students from the 30s and 40s returning for annual Fairbank reunions talk about their adventurous childhoods at Fairbank, some rode horses to school. The school was closed in 1944; students then were bused to Tombstone. In 2007, the school was restored to serve as a visitor center and museum; original materials were used wherever possible. Doors and windows were reconstructed to match the originals. The floor is original. The blackboards are from the Lowell School in Bisbee, the desks from Tombstone. The school structure was made of pressed gypsum blocks manufactured by the Arizona Gypsum Block Company in Douglas, Arizona. Buildings made of these blocks, each of which measures 24x12x9 inches are common around Cochise County in buildings from the early 20th century - a unique local building tradition.

**Small House.** This building dates to 1885. Originally 16 feet long, it was extended east by another 10 feet. Three sides still show the original board-and-batten construction; the front was covered with a shiplap facade. This house may have originally been built by William Hall and Harry McKinney who started the town. It is reported that a victim of tuberculosis was living in the house in the 1940s.

**Mercantile.** The Fairbank Mercantile building dates to 1882 and was open for business until 1973. Over the years, it housed stores, restaurants, a post office, saloon, gas station and jail. Among the business owners was Joseph Goldwater, great uncle of Arizona U.S. Senator Barry Goldwater.



Mercantile, ca 1960s  
Arizona Historical Society

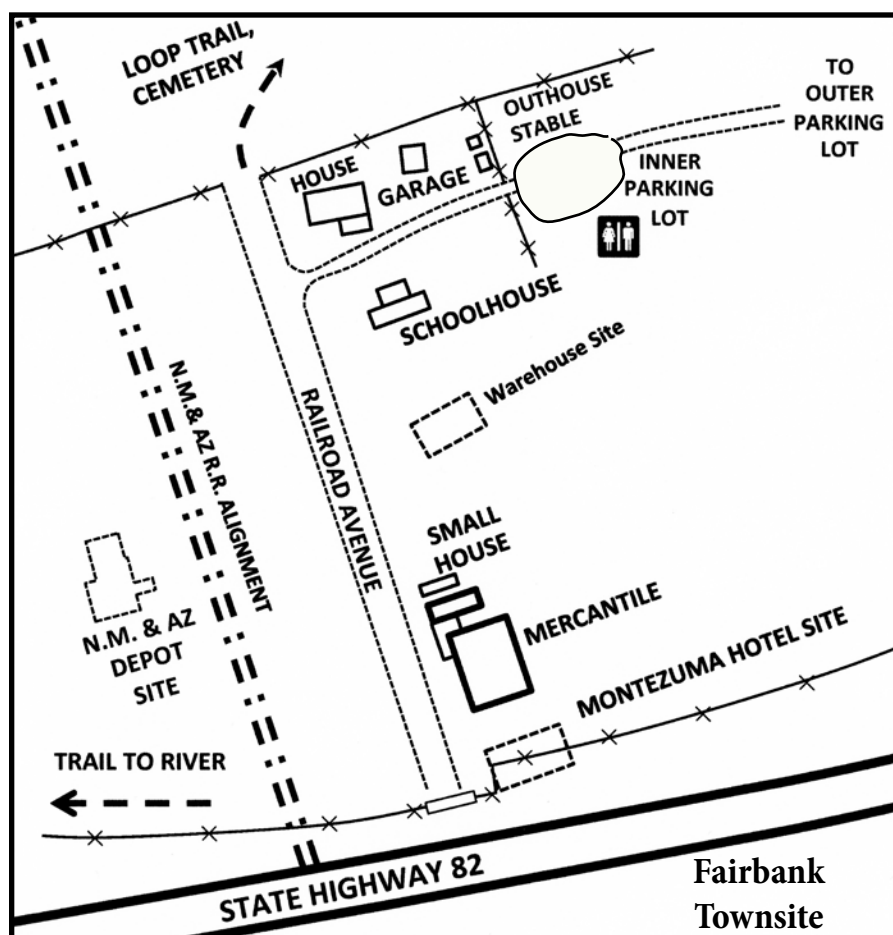
The Mercantile was primarily a railroad freight office where customers ordered goods for delivery via train. The building was originally three separate bays that were combined under a single roof sometime before 1913. As railroad traffic decreased, the Mercantile evolved and by the 1950s it functioned as a post office, country store and gas station. The Heney family owned the Mercantile from 1905 until it closed in 1973. Some who stopped here during the 1970s recall the elderly Heney sisters serving sandwiches and singing for patrons. The building stood empty after 1973. Because of rain damage, the southwest corner collapsed in 2007. The BLM has repaired the building and replaced windows and doors; braces hold the structure together. Plans to use the Mercantile as the visitor center were abandoned when the extent of the structural problems became known.



Montezuma Hotel, late 1890s  
Arizona Historical Society

**Montezuma Hotel (site).** Built in 1889 to serve railroad passengers, the hotel offered rooms, a restaurant and a saloon. In August, 1894 the hotel was badly damaged during a San Pedro River monsoon flood. Four feet of water, mud and sand inundated the hotel. Following this, the hotel was rebuilt higher up on a stone platform (visible in the picture above). A broad covered porch and row of trees surrounded the building. By 1909, Arthur Heney, owner of the Mercantile, purchased the hotel and renamed it the "Fairbank Hotel." Photographs taken in the late 1930s show a derelict building that was torn down during a highway construction project in the early 1940s. Today, the stone foundation of the building is visible near the Mercantile, under the highway fence.

**NM & AZ Depot (site).** Following construction of tracks south from Benson in 1881, the New Mexico and Arizona Railroad (NM&AZ) built a depot in 1882 to serve passengers and



Jeff Milton  
Arizona Historical Society

- his right arm was broken and bleeding profusely. He tore the sleeve of his shirt to tie off the arm to stop the bleeding. While passing out, Milton threw the keys to the safe into a pile of boxes in the car. The robbers searched for the keys and rifled the packages in the car - to no avail. As a crowd of citizens gathered, the outlaws fled. The affair continued, beyond our space to tell. Dunlap was left on the trail by the gang, who expected him to die. He was found by a posse and named Alvord and Stiles, who were not in the hold-up party. Dunlap died days later. Over the next few months most of the gang were arrested and jailed, although Alvord escaped from jail twice before ending up in the Yuma Territorial Prison. Gravely injured,

Milton was taken by train to San Francisco where he eventually recovered, although he lost partial use of his arm. Jefferson Davis Milton already had a distinguished career as a lawman in 1900: Texas Ranger, El Paso Chief of Police and Wells-Fargo guard. Later, he became the first Customs Agent patrolling the U.S. - Mexico border, a task he performed into his 70s. During the 1920s and 30s he and his wife lived in Fairbank and then Tombstone.

**The Chinese Community.** Chinese immigrants were mining in Arizona as early as 1868. Southern Pacific construction crews in Arizona in 1879 included 1,100 Chinese. Most Chinese were male "sojourners," in the U.S. temporarily to earn money to send home. Some stayed on in Arizona farming, running restaurants, laundries and other businesses, usually in the face of relentless hostility. Substantial "China Towns" existed in Phoenix, Tucson and Globe. "Hop Town" in Tombstone covered 2 blocks. The Can-Can restaurant, owned by Quong Kee, is still standing at the northwest corner of Allen and Fourth Streets. Most San Pedro River towns had "Chinese Garden" farms. Chinese farmers at Fairbank had irrigated croplands and a small settlement. A Chinese laundry was watched by Milton and other Customs Service agents, a stop on the illegal immigration route that ran from Mexico to Tombstone. Fairbank residents fondly remember fireworks the Chinese residents would detonate to celebrate their New Year. Chinese-Americans farmed at Fairbank into the 1950s.



NM&AZ Railroad Depot, 1890s  
Arizona Historical Society

freight, mostly going to and from Tombstone. Passengers arriving at Fairbank would ride a stagecoach to Tombstone for \$1.50. The depot was on the west side of the NM&AZ tracks, across from the Mercantile and hotel. There is no evidence of this building today. A water tower and pump house, still standing, were built at the same time, just south of the station (across Highway 82). At one time, the depot housed a Western Union telegraph station and a Wells-Fargo office. This was the site of the famous train robbery described below. Later, the depot became the home and office of the Southern Pacific agent living in Fairbank. The structure was accidentally burned down in the late 1980s.

**House.** The house across the street from the school is referred to as the "teacher's house." Former residents of Fairbank tell us that the teachers lived in this house until the school's closure in 1944. After that, it was used as a residence, probably for employees of the Little Boquillas Ranch. The house originally was fronted by a screened-in porch that was enclosed at some point.

**Garage, Stable and Outhouses.** These structures were constructed in 1941 by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) a New Deal era social program that funded local improvement projects throughout the U.S. Close inspection of the two-holer privy will reveal the initials "WPA" scribed into the concrete floor.

## Historical Notes

**The Train Robbery of 1900.** No other event in Fairbank's colorful history gained the notoriety of the robbery of February 15, 1900. An outlaw gang, secretly led by Wilcox Constable Bert Alvord and his deputy Billy Stiles, had robbed the Wells-Fargo Express car of a Southern Pacific train the prior year in the Sulphur Springs Valley and gotten away clean. Now they sought a repeat by robbing the Express car of the NM&AZ train as it stopped in Fairbank. A gang of 5 thugs, led by "Three Finger Jack" Dunlap waited at the station. When the Express Car guard, Jeff Milton, opened the car's doors to unload packages, the robbers, using the crowd waiting on the train platform as a shield, called out to Milton to leave the car and give them the keys to its safe. Milton refused and gunfire ensued. Milton, at first unable to return fire due to the crowd, was finally able to fire his shotgun, hitting Dunlap and wounding another outlaw. Milton was also hit